

Hello, my name is Cynthia Williams. I currently reside in Hamden and have returned to CT after residing in Jersey City, NJ for 4 years, working as an art facilitator in a wellness center. Now I am currently here in Hamden looking for housing and finding it a very challenging task because I am a double amputee and I need a scooter to get around. In addition to these challenges I am having a problem getting a prosthetic leg, batteries for my scooter and services in CT – even food stamps. The medical card I worked so hard to get still isn't even working.

Upon returning to CT I immediately went back to my recovery resource center, the Independence Center in Waterbury where I had been a member for 7 years before moving to New Jersey. If the Independence Center hadn't been open, I would not have been able to apply for housing, apply for my state aid and switch my medical back to CT. They assisted me with filling out applications, putting them through, faxing them, making phone calls and following up etc. We were on the phone with DSS for almost 2 hours. I could not have done all of this on my own without the support of IC staff. We need more help, more money, more funding. With Corona shutting us down it has hurt people with mental health issues on all levels.

We need more affordable housing for people with mental health issues. Make section 8 easier to get on. I currently can't find housing and if I don't find something within the next 3 months, I could lose my voucher. I feel like I am in a cage because there is nothing I can do. I can't get what I need to get my scooter going, I can't get into housing, I am stuck. I am trying to do the best that I can but it is so challenging. Everything is a waiting game, 3 or 4 weeks before I can get services or get the battery for my scooter.

Having the IC as a place to go to and have someone to talk to or see old friends is so important. I have made friends through the IC that I keep in touch with, it's like I never left and we support each other. The staff has been great, I was so happy to come back and find it open. I have dreams and visions and I am still here and loved. I just never thought it would be so hard to find an apartment when I got back home. Even with corona, the system is flawed. It is not funded or set up in a way that allows for someone to be able to find housing and get their needs met without jumping through hoops and waiting weeks on end for answers, supplies, responses to applications or admittance into programs.

I want to get back to being an advocate again, for mental health, for amputees. To get back on my feet. But first I need my basic needs met. Funding for mental health and housing is not just needed it is essential. It is our basic needs. Community based programs help support people and keep them out of hospitals and keep our independence and stability. All of our lives we were told that we had something wrong with us. Now we are trying to get out of the box but the state is not providing us with even the basic supports we need. Give our community supports that we so greatly deserve the funding and tools they need to help us and guide us on our journey of recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Cynthia Williams